

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY

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SECRETARY HICKEL GIVES FINAL APPROVAL TO NEW RULE FOR FEDERAL-STATE FISH AND GAME COORDINATION

Secretary of the Interior Walter J. Hickel has given final approval to a new regulation to promote stronger partnerships between Interior Bureaus and the State Game and Fish Commissions across the Nation.

Originally published on July 17, the regulation received favorable comments from the Governors of 22 States from Maryland to Hawaii, and from Minnesota to Texas; 15 Members of Congress; more than 50 officials of State game, fish and conservation agencies; and over 40 conservation interest groups.

The final version approved by the Secretary is unchanged from the proposed rulemaking published in July. It applies to all areas administered by the Secretary of the Interior -- 540 million acres -- through the National Park Service, Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife, Bureau of Land Management, and Bureau of Reclamation.

It provides an "umbrella" under which each Interior agency would develop written agreements with the various State Game and Fish Commissions regarding fish and wildlife activities to be conducted on Interior lands within the States.

Secretary Hickel emphasized that the regulation, and the agency agreements with the States, would not turn over lands to the States for fish and wildlife management. Rather, it would permit the Interior agency to cooperatively conduct management practices where such practices are consistent with the purpose for which the lands are administered. In particular, he stressed the regulation would not diminish his current authority over fish and wildlife, nor would it diminish the role of the National Park Service in performing its functions.

He noted that the language of the regulation specifies that public hunting, fishing and trapping will not be permitted in the National Park System except where provided for by the Congress or authorized by the Secretary.

"Nor will National Parks be used as a mere 'factory,' or breeding ground, for wildlife species to be hunted outside their boundaries, as a few people seem to fear," the Secretary said. "We are simply recognizing the need for Interior to encourage and assist the States to plan comprehensively for enhancing their fish and wildlife resources, in recognition of rapidly growing recreational demand by all segments of the public -- including nonhunters and nonfishermen."

The aesthetic, scientific, recreational, and economic importance of fish and wildlife resources are recognized by the new regulation.

Most of the Interior agencies involved presently have written agreements with State Fish and Game agencies, but the new regulation is aimed at accomplishing greater conformity with the Department's policies, Interior officials said. All agreements with the States are to be reviewed periodically by both parties and adjusted to changed conditions when appropriate.

"We believe this new regulation will be remembered as a landmark in Federal-State relationships for the benefit of the public as a whole," Secretary Hickel said.

The new regulation is being published in the Federal Register.

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Editors Note: Photographs of the signing ceremony are available on request from the Office of Information, Office of the Secretary, Washington, D. C. 20240.